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Home Course In Poultry Keeping

I.—What Branch of the Poultry Business.

By **MILO M. HASTINGS**,
Formerly Poultryman at Kansas Experiment Station, Commercial Poultry Expert of the United States Department of Agriculture, Author of "The Dollar Hen."

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POULTRY keeping more perhaps than any other industry is engaged in for the double purpose of profit and pleasure. The farmer is rarely conscious of the fact that he is keeping poultry for pleasure, yet the farm without its customary flock of chickens would seem rather dreary, and the farmer's table without its customary supply of fresh eggs and fried chicken would be sadly deficient.

The object of pleasure enters more largely in the case of those who keep poultry in towns and villages. Not only does the flock of chickens give the village or suburban resident an occupation which is a pleasure after confining indoor work and supply his table with a quality of food he cannot purchase in the market, but in the majority of cases villagers as well as many farmers find great pleasure in poultry breeding and exhibition as a hobby. The extent to which this phase of poultry keeping has been developed is readily seen from the multitude of poultry shows held throughout the country during the fall and winter months.

In attempting the study of a series of lessons in poultry keeping the poultryman or would be poultryman should form a clear conception in his mind of the relation in his own case of these various objects or ends for which the poultry business is commonly engaged in.

The Farm Flock.

The prime object for which the farmer keeps chickens is for his own table, and in order that he may have sufficient poultry products to supply his table throughout the year there will of necessity be at certain seasons a surplus for the market; hence the farmer who starts out to furnish his own table soon finds himself in the market end of the poultry business, and as a flock of 100 hens require but little more labor in their care than



"GOOD MORNING!"

twenty-five or thirty we find that the most prosperous and intelligent farmers keep a flock of about the former size.

Now, if the farmer's quota of hens goes much beyond this figure it will become necessary to divide the flock into smaller units and go to other troubles that are rather irksome for the general farmer who considers poultry as an adjunct of his regular farm operations. For the farmer who looks at it in this way simplicity in methods is advisable, for a general utility flock of this size will not yield a sufficiently large income to warrant more expensive methods of housing and care that would be perfectly proper in the case of a breeder of fancy fowls or a poultry farmer who kept several hundred hens.

The farm is an excellent place for breeding standard bred poultry, and I have nothing but encouragement for the farmer who is interested in the show bird end of it. In this case he will require separate houses and yards and a building wherein he may coop single fowls during the show season and will in general find it necessary to put more time and expense on his poultry work if he expects to make a success of the breeding stock part of the business.

The Village Poultryman.

The villager I would by all means advise to keep standard bred poultry and to take an interest in poultry breeding and poultry shows. From the nature of his surroundings he is obliged to keep his fowls yarded, and, as the time he spends with his chickens is recreation, the more individual care, which he will find it desirable to give fancy fowls, will not be begrudged.

The production of poultry products to sell at ordinary market prices is always profitable for the farmer, for on the free range plan of his poultry keeping labor and food costs are both much reduced. Poultry keeping can also be made profitable when engaged in on a large scale, in which case, be-



MILO M. HASTINGS

cause of the large number of chickens to be attended to, the labor can be reduced to a systematic basis and will require but very little time per fowl. On some of the well known egg farms one man feeds and cares for from 2,000 to 3,000 hens.

The village poultry plant where but a few dozen fowls are kept must necessarily have a larger feed bill than the farmer and a higher labor expense per fowl than either farm or commercial poultry plant. For these reasons the villager who hires a man to take care of his poultry or expects it to earn wages for his own time is, if the product is sold at ordinary market rates, very likely to be disappointed. Now, if the villager takes up fancy poultry breeding and devotes his time to the art he has excellent chances of becoming well known as a breeder and making a good profit in the business. Meanwhile he should have enough love for his work so that he will be content to get back a little more than his actual money outlay and give his time for the pleasure of the work and the hopes of profits later on.

Poultry Farming as a Business.

I presume there will be some who read this course in poultry keeping who will be desirous of engaging in poultry production as a business. To those I would say that after many years of precarious existence poultry farming is now established as a sound branch of agriculture. Although there is no greater money to be made from poultry than from many other branches of modern scientific agriculture, there is something about the business that has induced large numbers of ignorant people to invest their savings in poultry ventures, hopelessly burying their money in expensively equipped plants designed by themselves or others equally ignorant of the business.

As is generally recognized, the only sensible plan for one who proposes to go into poultry keeping as a business is to begin in a small way, either in a village or on a farm, and keep poultry for a few years in conjunction with some other occupation. If he is successful in this, it will then be time to consider the keeping of poultry on a more elaborate scale. A few general remarks on commercial poultry farming I will append, however, as a matter of general interest.

The branch of poultry keeping that has proved most universally successful in a large way is egg farming. The broiler farms have almost invariably been failures, and the principle is now pretty thoroughly recognized that the broiler should be considered as a by-product of the egg business, just as skim milk is a byproduct of the production of butter. Half or more of all chicks hatched will be cockerels and must be disposed of as broilers, for with Leghorns and other egg types of fowls male birds are worthless if allowed to mature. This large surplus of broilers from egg farms and from the general farm of the country is sufficient to meet the demand and to reduce the price to a point which will permit of little profit to the man who produces broilers exclusively.

The idea of the broiler business as attempted fifteen or twenty years ago was to produce chickens during the winter and early spring season by the use of incubators and brooders and secure fancy prices at the season of the year when no young stock was coming from the general farm. This business, which did not prove successful then, would be even more impractical now, as our modern methods of cold storage have become so efficient that it is entirely practical to freeze up a supply of inexpensive summer broilers and to meet the demand the following winter and early spring with this cheaply produced stock.

Another phase of poultry production which is successfully prosecuted in limited localities is the growing of roasters.

In this style of poultry flesh production heavier breeds of slowly maturing fowls are used, and both sexes are allowed to reach maturity and are then marketed as fancy stock. The possible profits of the production of extra fancy market fowls in this manner have been limited, however, by the custom of fattening or crate feeding farm grown cockerels as now engaged in by poultry packers and by many farmers as well. Crate or milk fed chickens offer a prime quality of young poultry flesh, and hence, except for a few markets where roasters from certain communities already have a reputation, it would hardly be advisable to take up this line of poultry production. A recent development in specialized poultry work is the public hatchery. This business is usually conducted in conjunction with large poultry plants. The shipping of day old chicks long distances by rail is now quite a fad and has probably been overdone. Another abuse of the public hatchery is the selling of chicks from eggs of uncertain origin. Beginners should not undertake public hatching.

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